



## Senator Sue Landske

200 W. Washington St.  
Indianapolis, IN 46204

News from the Indiana State Senate

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**Sen. Sue Landske**  
**Indiana Senate**  
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## Commission Studies Methods to Replace Property Taxes

"We want a better system," and "Do no harm," were the sentiments echoed in the Property Tax Replacement Study Commission, which has met several times at the Statehouse. The property tax situation in Indiana is a frustration shared by many as the newly-formed committee, consisting of legislators, farmers, businessmen, and homeowners, develops methods to reduce local government's reliance on property taxes.

The reassessment process is complete in 90 counties. Agencies and organizations are collecting data that will aid the committee and the legislature in figuring ways to replace over \$5.5 billion in property taxes collected each year and to provide oversight of over 9,000 levies and 172 different types of funds for local government programs and services.

This monumental task is being conducted due to a law passed during the 2004 legislative session. The commission must study the effects of eliminating 50 percent, 75 percent,

and 100 percent of net property tax levies.

One major hurdle for the commission is to identify revenue sources capable of replacing property taxes, while still providing sufficient revenue to maintain essential government services. The commission will submit status reports to the Legislative Council, which is the administrative body of the General Assembly, in September.

The commission broke down into small groups that will work on five major issues during the year: 1) Property Tax Administration Issues; 2) Local Government Services; 3) Long Term Debt Issues; 4) Other State Tax Systems; and 5) Property Tax Levies and Controls.

The goal is to lessen local governments' dependence on property taxes and create a more equitable and fair method of funding local government. As the commission continues its work this year, I'll keep you informed of the progress or you can contact my office for further information.

## State Faces Tough Budget Decisions

On July 12, the state closed the books for Fiscal Year 2004. According to official figures released by the State Budget Agency, the state is expected to have a "surplus" or "reserve" of just \$300 million on June 30, 2005 - the close of the current budget cycle. This means the state's reserve will have declined by nearly \$2 billion since 1998.

The problem is that state spending has been exceeding state revenues for the past several years. State revenue collections actually decreased in both Fiscal Years 2001 and 2002 before showing a 0.5 percent increase in 2003. Revenue collections increased by about 2.7 percent for Fiscal Year 2004, the year that just ended.

In order to avoid big spending cuts in education and health care, the state has been using the surplus, employing spending

delays and other temporary accounting measures. These measures allowed the state to spend nearly \$800 million more than it will collect this year. While there is nothing inherently wrong with these accounting measures - they helped the state avoid big spending cuts in our schools - these measures are only temporary fixes and cannot be sustained. So, while it may seem like Indiana's economy is improving, the state's financial condition actually remains very weak.

Beginning in January, the General Assembly will start work on the state budget for the next biennium. Much of the discussion will center on adequate funding for education and health care. But, it is equally important to continue to try to find ways to diversify the economy and stimulate business investment as the real long term solution to the state's budget dilemma.

# Get Involved!

..... How you can participate in the Indiana General Assembly

Voting is one very important way to make sure your views and concerns are being represented in government, but there are many other ways citizens can get involved to make our state a better place to live.

**Write letters:** During a typical day, a public official receives dozens of e-mails and letters with messages conveying his or her constituents' interest in a particular bill or issues. The key to getting your public officials' attention is to keep it simple, keep it short and make sure it's directed to the right person.

**Attend Interim Study committees:** During the interim, state legislators and local leaders meet publicly in study committees and commissions to discuss a variety of topics and decide if legislation is needed during the upcoming session. This is a great opportunity to hear discussion and voice your opinion. You can find the calendar of meetings online at: <http://www.in.gov/legislative/interim/calendar>. The calendar is updated regularly.

**Attend Standing Committees:** The legislative session allows the opportunity for citizens to come down to the Statehouse and listen to proposed legislation and

provide public testimony. Often, you must request an opportunity to speak by contacting the committee chairmen before the meeting. Find information online at: <http://www.in.gov/legislative/session/calendars>.

**Visit web sites:** The General Assembly and all state agencies have web sites that are available with information on a variety of topics and who to contact if you want more information. The General Assembly site has an area dedicated to when committee meetings are going, legislative surveys and links to email your senator. Go to [www.in.gov/legislative](http://www.in.gov/legislative) or visit [www.in.gov/senate\\_republicans](http://www.in.gov/senate_republicans).

**Organize or attend local events:** Many local communities have a variety of organizations dedicated to furthering a cause or improving the lives of its citizens. A great way to stay involved and give back is to attend functions sponsored by these groups. If you feel that an area needs representation, form an organization and work together to further your cause.

If you do not have Internet access at home, please visit the computer station at your public library.



## Consumer Information

### Unclaimed Property

The Attorney General reports thousands of unclaimed property listings all across the state of Indiana. Some possible sources of unclaimed property are: credit balances, old savings and checking accounts, unpaid wages, mutual fund shares, insurance proceeds, uncashed traveler's checks, and utility deposits.

You can contact the Indiana Attorney General's office to see if you or a relative has a claim.

Visit [www.indianaunclaimed.com](http://www.indianaunclaimed.com) or call, toll-free, **1-866-IN-CLAIM** (1-866-462-5246).

### Unwanted Faxes

Contact the Federal Communications Commission to report any unsolicited faxes. You can file a formal complaint at [www.fcc.gov/cgb/complaints.html](http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/complaints.html) or call, toll-free, **1-800-255-5322**.

### Direct Mail Lists

Tired of receiving advertising through the mail? Remove your name from direct mail lists by visiting

[www.dmaconsumers.org](http://www.dmaconsumers.org) or write to:

Mail Preference Service  
Attn: Dept 12851374  
Direct Marketing Association  
PO Box 282  
Carmel, NY 10512

### National No-Call List

Indiana led the way with the creation of a no-call registry. Federal legislators followed suit by creating a national do not call list. Consumers now can list both home and mobile phone numbers in order to prevent unsolicited telemarketing calls. To register your phone number on the national list, visit [www.donotcall.gov](http://www.donotcall.gov). Additions to the list are updated every three months.



## F.A.Q.

### Frequently Asked Questions About Indiana State Government

**Q:** Why is the Indiana General Assembly called a "citizen legislature?"

**A:** Indiana lawmakers spend only a few months each year at the Capitol. The rest of the year, each legislator lives and works in the district he or she represents. Our part-time legislature offers substantial savings to Indiana taxpayers. The National Conference of State Legislatures ranks Indiana 45 among the 50 states with regard to the expenditures of the legislature per capita.

**Q:** Where is the money generated from gaming profits, such as the Hoosier Lottery, river boats, pari-mutuel, etc., going?

**A:** Of the \$670 million of the state's share of gaming profits in 2003, \$294 million was dedicated to the Property Tax Replacement Fund to help subsidize homeowners' local property tax bills through payment of homestead credits. The second-largest share, \$236 million, cuts the "license plate tax," the excise tax Indiana motorists pay annually when renewing their vehicle license plates, by up to 50 percent yearly.

**Q:** How does the General Assembly function when it is not in session?

**A:** The Legislative Council is composed of 16 legislators, including the speaker of the House, president pro tempore, and floor leaders of the majority and minority parties. It is designed to provide an interim coordination structure for the General Assembly. Created in 1967 by combining and expanding existing legislative service agencies, the Council assists the General Assembly through its selection of interim study committees, research, fiscal analysis, and bill drafting staff.

**Q:** How does a senator author a bill?

**A:** A senator takes an idea for a bill to the non-partisan Legislative Services Agency. The staff provide necessary legal, fiscal, and research capabilities for the General Assembly. Drafting legislation, including major revisions of the Indiana Code, compiling and publishing the rules and regulations of state agencies, assisting study committees during the interim and standing committees during session, and furnishing figures on the estimated cost of existing or proposed state services are among the tasks performed by the LSA staff.



## Senators Study Variety of Topics In Summer Committee Meetings

### Landske serves on nine legislative panels during interim

This year, I have been appointed to chair the [Northwest Indiana Transportation Study Commission](#) and sit on the [Northwest Indiana Advisory Board](#). Both bodies serve as liaisons between state officials and Northwest communities, identify issues affecting the region and propose solutions.

I also received appointments to several legislative study committees, commissions and advisory boards:

#### Census Data Advisory Committee

This committee works closely with the Census Bureau to refine census techniques and make recommendations to the General Assembly regarding election laws.

#### Code Revision Commission

This commission assists in developing standards for the codification and revision of statutes to make them clear, concise and easy to interpret and apply

## New Census Survey to Provide Communities with Critical Information

Since 1790, a census has been conducted in the United States every ten years. It measures population, but also gives critical information to businesses, policymakers, and citizens on a variety of issues. Many citizens do not realize that the census numbers determine federal funding for states, cities and towns for schools, roads and even senior citizen centers. It informs our state and local officials in planning for housing and development and social services.

In the previous census years, most households received a "short form," census survey with seven questions, while one household in six received a "long form" with 46 more detailed questions. Beginning in 2010, all households in the U.S. will receive only the short form, which solely counts the population.

Information on the long form will be gath-

#### County Redistricting Commission

This commission must divide Lake County into three single-member districts for the election of county commissioners.

#### Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Compact Commission

The commission promotes the development and implementation of improvements to intercity passenger rail service in the Midwest

#### Shoreline Development Commission

This commission prepares a master plan for development of shoreline and establishes guidelines for shoreline grants

#### Steel Industry Advisory Commission

The commission examines state and federal statutes, rules and regulations that either encourage or discourage production and consumption of Indiana steel

#### Indiana Commission for Women

The commission assesses the needs of Indiana women and their families.



**SNAPSHOT:** Senator Landske discusses the details of a bill with a staff member. Massive amounts of time and research go into developing legislation.

While the fast pace of session ended in March, senators still have a lot of work to do during the summer and fall months, also known as the interim.

Legislators form commissions, study committees and advisory boards to examine issues in detail and to give more focused attention to particular issues not addressed during the legislative session.

## The Indiana Senate Page Program

The General Assembly offers students an important learning opportunity at the Statehouse.

Any student from 6th grade to 12th grade can sign up to serve as a page for a day. Students will be excused from school for the day.

Pages spend a day in the Senate assisting their local legislators. Responsibilities include responding to senators' requests, delivering messages and running errands. The day includes a tour of the Statehouse and observation of a session, if one is in progress.

Those interested in serving as a page should send their name, age, address, phone number and school affiliation to my office. The Page Office will begin accepting requests in November.